

South Dakota National Guard

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National Guard team honored during deployment ceremony

PIERRE, S.D. – Fifteen Soldiers from the South Dakota Army National Guard's 200th Engineer Company were honored during a deployment ceremony in Pierre, July 22.

Hundreds of family members, friends and community supporters assembled at the Riggs High School auditorium to say farewell to the Soldiers who will depart for a nine-month deployment to the Middle East.

The Soldiers will serve as a Bridge Training Team and provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems throughout the region. As a multi-role bridge unit, the 200th's mission is to assemble, maintain, repair and replace all standard U.S. Army bridge systems.

"The Soldiers of the 200th Bridge Training Team have been preparing for over a year both physically and mentally, spending weeks away from home, in preparation for this day. I can tell you we are ready," Capt. Mark Francisco said during the ceremony and officer in charge of the team. "We are ready for the challenges that will come before us, and we look forward to the day we can reunite."

Other ceremony speakers wishing the Soldiers well included Gov. Dennis Daugaard, U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem, Pierre Mayor Steve Harding, and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general.

"We gather to thank you, the members of the 200th, for answering the difficult call to leave the comfort of your homes and the embraces of your families to serve your country," said Daugaard. "To all of those deploying and to everyone else in their lives, thank you for your sacrifices, your patriotism and your hard work. Thank you for what you are doing for us."

"As adjutant general, I couldn't be prouder of this unit, of this team, as you get ready to go out the door," said Reisch. "You've executed a very rigorous training schedule from the start – learning how to assemble a bridge we don't even have in our inventory."

"But that is the versatility of this team and of the National Guard," continued Reisch. "If you give them a mission, they are going to execute it to the best of their ability. I'm very confident you are going to be successful on this deployment."

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, this will be the third mobilization for the Pierre, Chamberlain and Mobridge-based unit, which deployed forces to Iraq in 2003-2004 and Afghanistan in 2011-2012.

One Soldier who is going on his third career deployment is Capt. A.J. Armstrong, executive officer for the team.

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“Today is that ceremonial beginning – to be able to start the clock and have the official sendoff – it’s a good way to start it,” he said.

“It’s nice to see all the community support behind the Soldiers deploying,” added Armstrong’s wife, Ashley.

While A.J. and Ashley are not new to deployments, they will experience one for first time with children.

“This is actually our first deployment with kids, so this will be brand new with four kids,” said Ashley. “But we know what to expect and kind of the rules of the road.”

Both A.J. and Ashley had advice for the other Soldiers and family members who may be experiencing a mobilization for the first time.

“The biggest thing is to lean on your Guard family, for both the Soldier and the spouse,” said A.J. “There is a lot of support within the unit and within the other families, so lean on them as much as you can.”

“I agree with him completely,” added Ashley. “Leaning on the Guard family and others who have gone through this before, or are currently going through the same thing – it’s nice to have someone to lean on.”

Armstrong and the rest of his team members will report to Fort Bliss, Texas, to complete several weeks of theater-specific training prior to deployment overseas.

Sen. Rounds had these final words for the Soldiers to remember as they depart for their mission abroad.

“You are the best of the best,” said Rounds. “We wish you Godspeed. We want you to get your mission done. We want you to honor the commitment that every member of the armed forces of America has ever made, and then we want you to safely return back here to this nation, to this state, and to this community who waits for your return.”

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



170722-Z-FO002-0001: Fifteen Soldiers from the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 200th Engineer Company stand for the team roll call during a deployment ceremony at the Riggs High School auditorium in Pierre, S.D., July 22, 2017. The Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to the Middle East where they will serve as a Bridge Training Team and provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Carl Johnson)



170722-Z-FO002-0002: U.S. Army Spc. Jesse Parsons sits with his family during the deployment ceremony of the 200th Engineer Company’s Bridge Training Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, at the Riggs High School auditorium in Pierre, S.D., July 22, 2017. The 15 Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to the Middle East where they will provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Carl Johnson)



170722-Z-FO002-0003: U.S. Army Capt. A.J. Armstrong sits with his family, along with friends and community supporters, during the deployment ceremony of the 200th Engineer Company's Bridge Training Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, at the Riggs High School auditorium in Pierre, S.D., July 22, 2017. The 15 Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to the Middle East where they will provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Carl Johnson)



170722-Z-FO002-0004: U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Hunnel stands for the roll call during the deployment ceremony of the 200th Engineer Company's Bridge Training Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, at the Riggs High School auditorium in Pierre, S.D., July 22, 2017. The 15 Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to the Middle East where they will provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Carl Johnson)



170722-Z-FO002-0005: U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds and U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem express their thanks to U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Matt Thorn and the 15 Soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 200th Engineer Company during the unit's deployment ceremony at the Riggs High School auditorium in Pierre, S.D., July 22, 2017. The Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to the Middle East where they will serve as a Bridge Training Team and provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Carl Johnson)



170722-Z-FO002-0006: Gov. Dennis Daugaard addresses the crowd gathered during the 200th Engineer Company's Bridge Training Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, deployment ceremony at the Riggs High School auditorium in Pierre, S.D., July 22, 2017. The 15 Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to the Middle East where they will provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Carl Johnson)



170722-Z-FO002-0007: U.S. Army Capt. Mark Francisco, officer in charge of the 200th Engineer Company's Bridge Training Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, addresses the crowd gathered during the team's deployment ceremony at the Riggs High School auditorium in Pierre, S.D., July 22, 2017. The 15 Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to the Middle East where they will provide training and assistance to coalition forces on military bridge systems. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Carl Johnson)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact the SDNG Public Affairs Office at (605) 737-6721 or e-mail ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil